1st Series. No. 62.

THE

GOSPEL EXHIBITED

IN A

UNITARIAN MINISTER'S PREACHING.

BY GEORGE R. NOYES.

1798-1868

SECOND EDITION.

PRINTED FOR THE

American Unitarian Association.

BOSTON:

JAMES MUNROE & CO. 134 WASHINGTON STREET.

AUGUST, 1832.

Price 5 Cents.

I. R. BUTTS, PRINTER, 2 SCHOOL STREET.

THE GOSPEL EXHIBITED.

---

1 Cor. ix. 16. Yea, wo is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel.

On the recurrence of the anniversary of the interesting period, when I was set apart, by the solemnities of ordination, to be a preacher of the glorious gospel of the blessed God to you, the people of my charge, it is natural for us to look back upon the ground we have gone over. It is well for me to consider the manner in which I have discharged my duties, and for you to consider what improvement you have made under the advantages which you have enjoyed. I have felt myself impelled not only by inclination, but by a sense of duty, to reflect upon what I have done, and what I have left undone during the past year for the religious improvement of the souls for whom it is my privilege to labor; to consider what parts of my duty I may have neglected, or discharged with remissness; and what methods remain to be tried for the promotion of the temporal and everlasting welfare of this people.

The result of my meditations on the diligence and fidelity, or the contrary, with which I may have discharged my duties, it would neither be proper nor useful for

me to lay before you. The reflections, which have occurred to me, must be laid up in my own mind for my own use. I have abundant reason to humble myself before that omniscient One, to whom I am accountable; but it would be of no use to make my confessions to the ears of man.

But one part of the reflections, to which the anniversary of my ordination has naturally led me, may form a profitable subject of discourse to you at this time. I have been led to take a survey of the substance of the doctrines, which I have endeavored to illustrate and enforce. By an exhibition of a summary view of what have been the doctrines and duties, to which I have invited your attention, you, as well as myself, will be able more easily to perceive whether I have rightly divided the word of truth; whether I have declared to you the whole counsel of God; or whether I have subjected myself to the wo incurred by those, who, in contradiction to their obligations and professions, preach not the gospel. The subject of discourse, then, will be, a summary view of the doctrines and duties of the gospel, as understood by me, and, as I suppose, by most of the denomination, to which I belong.

I. The foundation of all religion, and that which gives a complexion to all its parts, is the nature and character of God. In respect to this, it has been my object to deepen in your minds the conviction of the existence of one God, of infinite power, wisdom, goodness, justice, and mercy, and the existence of but one God. I have endeavored to show that all the appearances of nature, all that we can see in the heavens above or the earth beneath, may be accounted for upon the supposition of the exist-

ence of a single Infinite Mind; that nothing less will account for the existence of the universe; and that anything more is inconsistent with that unity of design, which is stamped upon all the works of creation.

I have endeavored to show that this doctrine of the perfect unity of God is sanctioned by revelation as well as proclaimed by the works of nature; and I have endeavored to defend the doctrine from whatever appeared to me to be inconsistent with it. In particular I have endeavored to show that the doctrine of the Trinity, so called, is subversive of the unity of God, and wholly at war with the Scriptures. This doctrine teaches that there are three distinct agents, each of which is God Supreme. Each of these agents is said to have his own particular will, and to perform different parts in man's redemption and salvation, neither doing the work of the other. Now to assert, that each of three such intelligent agents is God Supreme, appears to me to be the same thing as to assert that there are three Gods. I do not mean to charge Trinitarians with holding a belief in three Gods. I know not what subtile distinctions their minds can make; nor what idea of unity they have, when they say that three intelligent agents, each of which is God, make together but one God. I only say that the proposition, There are three intelligent agents, each of which is God Supreme, and the proposition, There are three Gods, appear to my mind to be synonymous.

In consequence of what has been said of our denomination, it is necessary to state, that we believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the holy spirit. But to believe that these three are one and the same being, is quite a different thing. Baptism has sometimes been

represented as an act of worship; but very erroneously. "Know ye not," says the Apostle, "that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" Is then the death of Christ an object of worship? Of the children of Israel, too, it is said, "They were baptized into Moses." But was Moses the object of their religious worship? St. Paul asks, "Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" But did he mean to ask whether he had been worshipped by the Corinthian converts?

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and holy spirit, is a profession of faith or belief in the Father, who raised up Jesus to be our teacher and Saviour, in the Son or Messiah, who finished the work which was given him to do by the Father who sent him, and in the holy spirit, which was shed abundantly upon the Apostles, and which is now given to those, who ask the Father for it.

The apostolic benediction, "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the holy spirit be with you all," has sometimes been quoted in support of the Trinity. But does this verse declare that God, and Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit are one and the same being, or that each of them is God? No. Neither is this benediction properly an act of worship; but rather a benevolent wish, an aspiration. If, however, any prefer to regard it as a prayer, it is a prayer to the Father of all. The grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the holy spirit, are the subjects, not the objects, of the petition. They are prayed *for*, not prayed *to*. The following form of expression, "May the blessing of God, and the favor of good men, be your portion," makes good men objects of

worship as much as the apostolic benediction makes Jesus the object of supreme worship. The phrase, "May the communion of the holy spirit be with you," means, May a participation of the holy spirit be with you; i. e. May you partake of spiritual influences.

I will here remark that if it could be proved that the Apostles did ask of Jesus such aid as they thought he could afford them, it would by no means follow, that they regarded him as God. When Jesus was just about to leave them, he said "*I will ask the Father*, and he will give you another comforter;" thus implying that his power to help them would be by intercession with his Father, to whom he was going, and who was greater than he. The Roman Catholics pray to the Virgin Mary and to the saints. This does not prove that they regard them as gods.

In opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, Unitarians maintain that the only true God and the only proper object of religious worship is the Father, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* The following declarations of Jesus, and his Apostles, seem to furnish ample support to the doctrine which I maintain. "And this is life eternal that they might know *Thee, the only true God*, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."† "*One Lord*, one faith, one baptism, *one God and Father of all*, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."‡ "But to us there is but *one God the Father*, of whom are all things, and we in him; and *one Lord* Jesus Christ, by whom are all things [i. e. relating to the christian religion] and we by him."‖ For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ

* Ephesians i. 3. † John xvii. 3. ‡ Ephesians iv. 5. 6.
‖ 1 Corinthians viii. 6.

Jesus."* "Denying the only Lord God, *and* our Lord Jesus Christ."† "In that day ye shall ask *me* nothing. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, he will give it you."‡ "My Father is greater than I."§ "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."|| Of these two last passages it is, indeed, said, that Jesus uttered them concerning his *human nature*. But the Scriptures nowhere teach us that Jesus had more natures than one, and Jesus made no qualification, when he made the above assertion. No Unitarian teaches the dependence of Jesus in a more unqualified manner than he declared it. In order to understand in what sense he denied a knowledge of the day and the hour in the verse above quoted, let it be considered in what sense the disciples proposed the question. When, full of anxiety, they came to him with the entreaty, "Tell us, when shall these things be? did they suppose that they were applying to him in his merely human capacity? Or did they suppose that they applied to him in his highest capacity? Certainly they could have expected a knowledge of future events only from the latter. Unless therefore Jesus meant to deceive his disciples, he intended to deny that he knew the day and the hour, in his highest capacity.

II. Jesus Christ I have always represented as a being clothed with the most exalted powers, possessing a character worthy of our admiration and love, sustaining towards us the most interesting relations, and performing for us the most important offices. I have represented

* 1 Timothy ii. 5. † Jude 4. ‡ John xvi. 23.
§ John xiv. 28. || Mark xiii. 32.

him as the Son of God, "the mediator between God and man." * I have claimed for his precepts, the authority of commands of God; for his doctrines, the authority of the words of God. I have represented him as deserving a place in your hearts, inferior only to that of his Father and our Father, of his God and our God. I have represented him as deriving his fulness of power and wisdom from the Father; according to the declaration of Scripture, "*It pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell." † This verse affords a key, by which all the titles, attributes, and actions which are ascribed to Jesus in the Bible, may be explained in perfect consistency with the infinite superiority of his Father, whom he himself acknowledged as the giver of all his qualifications.‡ I have also represented him as a Saviour of the world by the appointment of the Father; according to the Scripture, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour."§ I have also represented him as the judge of the world by the appointment of the Father, according to the declaration, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ."|| In a word, I have ever represented Jesus as possessing all the qualifications to render him an infallible guide, a glorious redeemer, an all sufficient Saviour, and an impartial judge; but yet as having *received* all these qualifications from his Father and our Father, his God and our God; according to his own declaration, "All power is *given* unto me in heaven and in earth."¶ He possessed them not from eternity;

* 1 Tim. ii. 5. † Coloss. i. 19. ‡ John v. 19, 30.
§ Acts v. 31. || Rom. ii. 16. Acts x. 42. xvii. 31.
¶ Matt. xxviii. 18. Comp. Col. i. 19. John iii. 34, 35, v. 19, 30. Acts ii. 22. Rev. i. 1.

not until they were given him. Exalt the Saviour as high as you will, he that bestowed all his glory upon him, must be still higher. The qualifications which I have ascribed to Christ are often termed his divinity; and in this sense of the term, I have ever strenuously maintained the divinity of Christ.

III. The Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, I have represented as the influence, energy, or mind of God, and no more a distinct person from God, than the spirit of a man, is a distinct person from the man.* The Supreme Being is often represented as "pouring out his spirit,"† "shedding it abundantly,"‡ &c., and Christians are said to be "partakers of the holy ghost;"§ language inconsistent with the personality of the spirit. The Scriptures never represent the holy spirit as an object of love or adoration. In many passages we are required to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, to love the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity, but never to love the holy ghost. The reason can be no other, than what I have stated, viz. that the holy spirit, or spirit of God, either denotes God himself, without distinction of person, or the influence and energy of God. Hence we are required to pray to God *for* the spirit, never to pray *to* it. The language of the bible is, not that the spirit listens to prayer, but that "God will give his holy spirit to them that ask him."||

The preceding view of the divine spirit is the same that was held by the pious Dr. Watts. From an ample illustration of the subject by him, I quote the following passages:

* 1 Cor. ii. 11. † Acts ii. 17. ‡ Titus iii. 6.
§ Hebrew vi. 4. || Luke xi. 13.

"And indeed if the Holy Spirit were really a true and proper person, it would be as difficult to account for all these, and many more expressions in Scripture, which cannot properly be ascribed to a proper person; and if in some places these *impersonal expressions*, or in other places the personal expressions, must be figurative, why may not my explanation of them do as well as the contrary? And thus the Spirit of God need not anywhere be construed into a real, proper, distinct person."

"Yet let it be remembered, (as is said before) that even in some of these impersonal senses it may be sometimes represented as performing personal actions, according to the Hebrew idiom; as Wisdom, the Law, the Scripture, Righteousness, Sin, Death, and many other things, are described as persons. So "the anointing teacheth us all things;" 1 John ii. 27. 'The spirit lusteth against the flesh, Gal. v. 17.

"But I know not any place of Scripture, which requires us to make express personal addresses, either of prayer or of praise, unto the Spirit, as we are taught to do to the Father, and to the Son; nor can I find where we are required to fear him, or to adore him as God, or to trust in him, or so much as to follow after the knowledge of him; but for these benefits which we receive from him, we are directed by precepts or examples in Scripture to address or pray to the Father or the Son, Luke xi. 13, Rom. xv. 13, John xv. 26, but not to the Spirit himself.

"There are many Christians, indeed, who cannot suppose that several texts of Scripture can be explained by the Spirit of God, considered as an essential power or principle in the Godhead, because the Spirit of God is always represented as ministering to God, or to Jesus

Christ, as sent by both the Father and the Son, on all his messages, and seems to be distinguished from them as another person in the form of baptism, and in 1 John v. 7, where three bear record in heaven, and in other scriptures.

"But we must remember that not only the Hebrew tongue, but almost all languages represent many things in a personal manner, which are not real persons: such as Life, Death, Virtue, Time, Fate, Nature, Providence, Conscience, Appetite, &c. And we say, God and his Spirit, as well as we say God and his Providence, God and Nature, do this, or that.

"It is objected also, that the Spirit of God is sometimes represented in a lower character, as a mere messenger, John xvi. 13. 'When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, &c.'

"But we should consider, that though the Spirit of God itself, or the divine principle of knowledge and power in the Godhead, cannot be so properly represented in a lower character, yet the influences and operations, the gifts or effects, of the Spirit of God, which are often called the Spirit, may be said to be sent, conveyed, or bestowed upon men; and that even not only by God the Father, or by Jesus Christ, but also by the hands of the Apostles. Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts viii. 17." *

IV. There is no doctrine, which I have been more

* Watts's Faithful Enquiry, &c. p. 30—35.

anxious to impress upon your minds, than that of the paternal character of God. I have endeavored to represent him as not only in name, but in reality, the Father of his creatures. I have endeavored to show that the principles of his government, his purposes, and designs respecting men, his requirements and prohibitions, and his present and future treatment of them, are consistent with the character of a father. I have represented him as our Father by the gift and preservation of our bodies and our souls; our Father by his care for our temporal enjoyments; our Father by the reasonableness and equity of his laws; our Father by imposing upon his children no useless restraints and austerities; by laying upon them no greater burden than their strength will bear; by requiring no more of them than he has given them ability to perform; our Father by his disposition to pardon a penitent offender without money and without price — without any other inducement than his own eternal mercy; our Father in the gracious plans he has adopted for the reformation and salvation of sinners, particularly in so loving the world as "to send his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him;" our Father in his corrections and chastisements in this world, and in the punishments he has threatened in another; our Father in the promise he has given "to help the infirmities" of those who ask his spiritual aid; and our Father in the unspeakable rewards which he has promised to those who seek them by patient continuance in well-doing.

By unfolding and illustrating the preceding representation of the paternal character of God, I have endeavored to draw you to him by cords of love, rather than

to drive you by images of terror; to melt your hearts by his mercies, rather than to break them by his judgments; to induce you to render him the cheerful obedience of children, rather than the constrained submission of slaves. For nothing are we more indebted to Jesus than for this; that by his declarations, his parables, his disposition and his example, *He has shown us the Father.*

It has been my purpose in the course of my ministry to establish in your minds what I believe to be the truths of the gospel, rather than expressly to oppose prevalent errors. There are three doctrines, however, which I have felt myself bound to oppose as inconsistent with the precious doctrine of the paternal character of God, and as wholly unsupported by the inspired teachers. These are the doctrines of unconditional personal election, of total native depravity, and of substituted or vicarious punishment, in all the various shapes which it has assumed.

1. The doctrine of unconditional personal election, in the mildest form of it, teaches that before the foundation of the world, God, from his mere good pleasure, foreordained or appointed certain individuals of the human family to the enjoyment of eternal happiness, uninfluenced to such a choice by any foresight of their future characters; while from the same good pleasure he determined to withhold his saving mercy from others, to pass them by, and to ordain them to eternal wrath for their sins. This doctrine, instead of magnifying the grace of God, seems to me to change it into partiality and caprice; and to be suited to make men easy in the neglect of strenuous efforts, and the appointed means for obtaining salvation. For if the crown of victory has been determined ten thousand ages before the contest, to be

bestowed upon certain individuals, and to be withheld from others, why should I labor in vain, and spend my strength for naught, in running the christian race? If I am one of those fortunate individuals, I shall receive the crown; if I am not one, I shall not receive it. For who can annul a decree of the Almighty?

You tell me, indeed, that God is merciful; that Jesus has died for all; that heaven and hell are presented to my choice. But of what avail is all this, if God has passed an irresistible decree that heaven shall be the portion of a definite number of individuals, and of no others? Is this consistent with the character of him, who invites "every one that thirsteth, to come, and drink of the waters of life freely;"* who hath promised "to render to every man according to his deeds,"† and, above all, who hath assumed towards his creatures the endearing appellation of *Father?* I appeal to your own hearts, ye fathers! Yea, where is the father or the mother that would treat a family of children in the manner which is ascribed to our Father in heaven?

2. Another doctrine which I have felt myself bound to oppose, as inconsistent with the paternal character of God, is that of the total native depravity of man. According to this doctrine, all mankind come into the world with a nature entirely depraved and corrupt, wholly opposed to all that is spiritually good, and inclined to all that is evil, morally incapable of any holy exercise, until they receive a *special* influence from God, which may, or may not be afforded; or which is afforded to some and withheld from others; and those, from whom this special

* Isa. lv. i. † Rom. ii. 6.

influence is withheld are doomed to everlasting wo for the sins which they commit, while acting according to their nature. I have maintained, and still maintain, that the cruelty implied in this doctrine is as great, as if the Supreme Being should torture the lion of the forest, or the eagle of the air, for seizing and devouring their prey. It represents our Creator as guilty of conduct that would disgrace an Egyptian taskmaster, and exactly the reverse of what might be expected from a kind and merciful father.

In opposition to this doctrine, I have maintained that man is by nature, or in consequence of his natural birth, neither holy, nor unholy, but capable of becoming either, by the use or abuse of his power of choosing between good and evil; by the right or wrong application of his faculties; and by the restraint, or indulgence, and the direction, or misdirection of affections, which are a part of his nature. What I have maintained may, I think, be expressed in the language of Scripture; "God made man" i. e. mankind, "upright" or innocent; "but *they* have sought out many inventions."*

In a loose and popular sense it may indeed be said that men are naturally inclined to sin; but not even in this sense, that they are *totally* inclined to sin. I apprehend that it is in a very loose sense that the majority of those who are not professed theologians, assent to the doctrine of native depravity. If by a natural inclination to sin it be meant that men are prone to indulge to excess certain natural appetites, desires, and passions, which are good in themselves, and even necessary to our

* Eccl. vii. 29.

very existence, preservation, and happiness, then I am a believer in the doctrine. For the appetite for food, for drink, and for the gratification of other of the senses, unless restrained by reason, conscience and religion, degenerates into gluttony, drunkenness, lust, and sensuality. So the desire of esteem, of power, and of property, which are essential principles of our nature, degenerate into criminal vanity, ambition and avarice.

Each of these desires may be directed to right or wrong objects and ends. The desire of the esteem of God, of Jesus, and of good men, is right. The desire of power, as a means of greater usefulness, is right, as also the desire of property. The passion of anger is a principle of our nature. It is a good principle. One may "be angry and sin not." When excited by a just cause, and exercised in due degree, it often proves an armor of defence to the weak, when cool reason would be timid and inactive. But this passion indulged to excess, and unrestrained by reason, conscience, and religion, becomes hatred, malice, revenge, and murder.

If, therefore, by natural depravity it be meant that we have by nature appetites, desires, and passions, which are very liable to be indulged to excess, and to be fixed upon, or confined to, wrong objects, then I am a believer in natural depravity.

But let it be remembered, that in order that we may be able to restrain and regulate these natural appetites, desires, and affections, and to fix them upon proper objects, we have within us what may be called our better nature; what the Apostle Paul calls "the law of our minds."*

* Rom. vii. 23.

We have by nature, reason, conscience, a love of spiritual excellence, a susceptibility of religious impression, a capacity for fixing our thoughts and affections upon God, of loving him as soon as his lovely character is fairly and fully presented to our minds, and of being influenced by all the hopes, fears, and encouragements, which natural and revealed religion present to our view. We have also the promised aid of the Divine Spirit to help our infirmities.

It is, therefore, evident that we are morally, as well as physically, capable of becoming holy, as well as of becoming wicked; that sin is the abuse of our nature; that "the law of our mind" is as natural as "the law of our members;" that it is as unnatural, as it is ungrateful and wicked, to withhold our love from our Father in heaven. It is true, however, that our appetites and desires, the lower part of our nature, are exercised and developed at an earlier period, than our reason and conscience, and at a period when the mind can only very imperfectly comprehend the peculiar objects of religion. Thus, owing to the nature of the case, and the imperfection of early education, the lower principles of our nature have usually gained undue strength before reason and conscience and the capacity of religion have come to maturity. Hence the necessity of the christian warfare. Hence all are included under sin, and must, in a greater or less degree, repent and be converted.

The views which I have given of our nature seem to me not only more honorable to God, but better adapted to promote repentance and humility in man, than the opposite views. The higher opinion you give men of their nature, the more will they be humbled at what they have

made themselves by their own choice; by their voluntary transgressions of the law. With such views of his nature every sinner may feel the force of the address of Jehovah to Israel; "Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; why then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?"*

3. Another doctrine, which I have felt bound to oppose, as inconsistent with the paternal character of God, is that of vicarious or substituted punishment; i. e. punishment borne by one, who did not commit the crime, in place of those that did. This doctrine teaches that God could not, consistently with his honor and the principles of his government, forgive sinners without inflicting their punishment, the penalty incurred by them for their sins, upon an innocent person. It teaches, also, that the sufferings of Jesus, inflicted by Jewish malice, and naturally arising from the circumstances in which he was placed, were not all that he was obliged to endure. It teaches — O my merciful father, what have not men imputed to thee! — that, when the cup of Jewish malice was exhausted, then Almighty power interposed to inflict additional misery upon that innocent head; and this, they tell us, for the purpose of convincing men that God is just!

In opposition to such views I have maintained the free, unpurchased, unmerited grace of God. The language of the prophet Ezekiel, and similar language throughout the Bible, give me a better ground of hope than any of the artificial, heartless theories of which punishment by substitute is the basis. "When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do

* Jer. ii. 21.

that, which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he hath robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live: he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live."*

The doctrine of punishment by substitute, as it has been exhibited by most Calvinistic writers since the days of Calvin, appears to be inconsistent with the doctrine of future punishment. For if the punishment has been once borne, and the full penalty of the sins of all mankind endured by a substitute, with what justice could this punishment be inflicted upon the offenders themselves, penitent, or impenitent?

This doctrine seems also to be inconsistent with the pardoning mercy of God. For is it not an abuse of language to say that one has pardoned an offence, when he has received from a substitute all that strict justice could claim from the offender?

The theory of punishment by substitute, in every form of it, I have endeavored to prove to be inconsistent with the character of a wise and righteous moral governor. No earthly ruler, unless in a barbarous age, ever acted on this principle. That it is inconsistent with the character of God as a father, I appeal to the heart of every parent now present. If some of your children, having committed an offence, or many offences, should become penitent, fall down on their knees, and ask your forgiveness, would you say to them, I cannot, consistently with my authority as a parent, forgive you, unless my elder, my first-born son

* Ezek. xxxiii. 14—16

shall bear the punishment, which you have deserved? The prodigal son, in the parable, heard no such language from his father. *

Besides, does not common sense decide that the assertion, that Jesus bore the penalty, or punishment due to our sins, is as contrary to plain matter of fact, as the assertion that bread and wine after consecration become real flesh and blood? When we consider that, not having a guilty conscience, Jesus could not have a sense of the divine disapprobation or displeasure, on account of his sins; that he could not feel that he had brought his sufferings upon himself by his misconduct; that angels came from God to strengthen him in the midst of his sufferings; and that he knew that within a very short time he was to be received to the right hand of his Father, how absolutely contrary to matter of fact is the assertion that Jesus suffered the penalty or punishment, threatened for the sins of a single man, much less of the whole world. I put the question to the common sense of any man, who has given up the idea of a punishment by material fire (and I understand this to be the case with the Orthodox generally), What idea can you form of future punishment, if you exclude from it the idea of a sense of guilt, remorse of conscience, a sense of the displeasure of God for your sins, and include in it the reception of aid and comfort sent from God by his angels, the thought that your sufferings are owing to no fault of your own, and the sure hope of speedily exchanging your sufferings for infinite and eternal happiness?

But what is meant by the Scripture assertion, that

* Luke, ch. xv.

Christ "bore our sins"? The meaning is, that he suffered and died in order to save us from our sins. St. Matthew, after recording the many miracles, which Jesus performed on a certain occasion, tells us that these things were done, "that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, — Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." If then Christ might bear our sicknesses by exercising a benevolent sympathy and his power of healing, why not bear our sins by benevolent labors and sufferings to redeem us from all iniquity? I see no more evidence that in bearing our sins, he bore our punishment, than that in bearing our sicknesses, he suffered all the pains and distresses, of which he relieved others.

But what is the meaning of the verse, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." I answer, that it appears from the context, that by the curse of the law, is meant the temporal penalties of the Mosaic law, such as being stoned to death for violating the Sabbath, being excommunicated for omission of circumcision, &c., and not the punishment due to sinners in the future world; and that by Jesus "being made a curse for us," is meant that he was "treated *by men*, as a violator of the law; as if he had committed a crime worthy of death and of the wrath of God." It appears from Deut. xxi. 23, to which the Apostle alludes, that one, who suffered an ignominious death like that of crucifixion, was said by the Jews to be accursed of God. To "be a curse for us" means, therefore, the same thing as to be crucified for us, i. e. for our benefit.

By wicked hands was Jesus crucified and slain. He was never punished, or tortured by God. When he utter-

ed the prayer, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do;" he seems not to have suspected that his severest agony came directly from that Father, to whom he prayed.

What, then, it may be asked, is the meaning of the language, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him?" I answer, nothing is plainer to one who will compare one Scripture expression with another. In the Scriptures, God is frequently said *to do* what takes place in the course of divine providence, *or what he permits to be done.* Thus he hardened Pharaoh's heart. Thus, also, it is said, "He bruiseth, and bindeth up." So the Apostle Paul says, "God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death." He did not, however, believe that his reproaches and sufferings were the direct infliction of God. It is true that the divine purpose was fulfilled and not disappointed by the sufferings of Christ; and so it is by the sufferings of all good men. It does not follow, however, that the sufferings of Jesus, or the sufferings of good men for conscience' sake are directly inflicted by God, or that they receive torment from him, in addition to what they receive from the hands of men. It was the will of God that the Jews should reverence his Son, that they should believe on him, and be made happy by him. His commands and his invitations through Jesus were all sincere, although it pleased him to make the sufferings and death of Jesus, which he permitted the Jews to inflict upon him, a powerful means of redeeming and saving the world. It is exactly in the Hebrew idiom to speak of what Divine Providence permitted Jesus to endure, in the language, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him."

Still it is a great truth that Jesus died for sinners; that he died "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God."* But the meaning of this language is that he died *for our benefit*, not that he died *in our stead*. He died to reconcile man to God, not to reconcile God to man. This is the Scripture doctrine of atonement. "All things are of God," says the Apostle, "who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ."† And reconciliation is atonement. The same Greek word, which is translated *atonement* once only in the New Testament, is elsewhere translated *reconciliation*.

He died that we might live. His death was an important means of giving spiritual life to the world. It has been the means of turning an innumerable company from darkness to light; from the dominion of sin to the empire of religious principle, and Christian holiness. By being "lifted up" he has drawn multitudes to him, as their guide and Saviour.

The great consequence of his death, connected with the events subsequent to it, has been the establishment of his religion in the world, the triumph of Christianity over Jewish unbelief and Gentile superstition. In the scheme of the divine providence, it was important that the Messiah should suffer and taste of death, that he might establish his religion upon the most solid foundation, engage the affections of men in it, and give interest and efficacy to the great truths which he taught, and to the precepts, which he delivered during his life.

Perhaps it is not within the power of our limited faculties to comprehend all the reasons, which made it neces-

* 1 Pet. iii. 18. † 2. Cor, v. 18. See also Rom. v. 10.

sary that the Messiah should suffer and die. That it was necessary we have the uniform testimony of the Scriptures. The general design of his sufferings is also stated with great plainness. "I, if I be lifted up," says he, "shall draw all men to me."* My death will exert an attractive influence upon the wayward hearts of men. "Who gave himself for us," says Paul, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."† It is worthy of particular notice, that it was not to redeem us from the vengeance of one, who could exercise no forgiveness, until the full penalty of justice without mercy was paid; it was not to quench the burning wrath of a hard and stern master, that Jesus gave himself for us. No. The language of the Apostle is express, that it was "to redeem us *from all iniquity.*" In similar language says another Apostle, "Ye were not redeemed from your *vain conversation* by corruptible things, as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ."‡ This is a very important point. We are prone to entertain the thought that Jesus suffered to save us from some distant evil; to redeem us from some outward calamity; and to purchase our freedom from a deserved penalty by taking it upon himself. But this is contrary to the passages which have been adduced from Scripture, and to others, which might be adduced. From them we learn, that Jesus gave himself for us that he might redeem us from something within our own hearts, viz. from all iniquity — that he might "save us from our sins,"§ redeem us from our vain conversation,

* John xii. 32. † Titus ii. 14. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 18. § Mat. i. 21.

"purge our consciences from dead works,"* and draw us to him by cords of love. Depend upon it, my friends, Jesus is a Redeemer and Saviour to no one of us, only as we are induced, by the motives presented in his life, his death, and his instructions, to renounce our vain conversation, to lament and forsake our sins, and to depart from all iniquity. The true redemption, the genuine salvation is to be wrought within us by the exercise of our own free wills. It is the reconciliation of the soul to God. It is the exaltation of the fallen spirit from the depths of depravity. It is deliverance from the hell of a polluted heart and a torturing conscience. It is the establishment within the soul of the spirit of love to God and love to man. This is the true redemption. This is the only salvation, worthy of the name. To effect this glorious freedom and perfection of the soul Jesus lived and died; and he is glorified more and more in proportion as this object is accomplished.

But the question again recurs to your minds, How does the death of Jesus contribute to this renovation of the soul, this freedom from sin, this dominion of conscience, this reign of virtue and piety in the heart?

1. His death convinces us of his sincerity and truth, as a messenger from God. He sealed his testimony with his blood. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world," says he to Pilate, "that I might *bear witness to the truth.*"† For the same end he died. "When ye have *lifted up* the son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."‡

* Heb. ix. 14. † John xviii. 37. ‡ John viii. 28.

He would not renounce the work, which was given him to do, in order to save his life. He persevered in his declaration, that he was a teacher sent from God, that he was the promised Messiah, the inspired lawgiver, and future judge of the world, in the midst of ignominy and torture, when by retracting it, he might have received the homage of a nation. Had he been willing to abandon the object for which he was sent into the world, and to keep back the words of eternal life, and withhold his testimony to the truth, he needed not to have been suspended upon the cross. Had he complied with the wishes of those, who came to take him by force and make him king, he would have been the object of their enthusiastic attachment instead of their inveterate hatred; instead of curses he would have received shouts of applause; instead of "Crucify him, Crucify him," the popular cry would have been, "Hosanna to the Son of David;" instead of the crown of thorns, he would have received the royal diadem; and instead of being nailed upon the ignominious cross, he might have been securely elevated upon the throne of Judea. But such was his respect for his Father's will, that he chose to suffer rather than disregard it; such was his fidelity to his high commission of enlightening and saving the world, that he chose to die rather than abandon it; such was his love for men, that he chose to be crucified rather than that they should perish in ignorance and unbelief. Now we can look to the cross, and know that we repose our faith in an innocent, a disinterested, a faithful and true witness, who poured out his life-blood to seal the new covenant, which he brought and assure us of its validity. His blood is the witness to us of his sincerity, the broad seal of the truth of all his

declarations, and consequently an important ground of our faith in the divinity of his religion, the obligation of his precepts, and the certainty of the rewards and punishments, proposed by him as the sanctions of duty. If, then purity of heart is the result of such a faith, it is also the result of that which gives strength and assurance to this faith, i. e. of the death of Jesus.

2. His death was necessary as a preparatory step to that most convincing proof of the truth of his religion, which was afforded by his resurrection from the dead. This glorious event has ever been the chief corner stone, on which the truth of Christianity has rested. By it "he was shown to be the Son of God with power."* In allusion to this design of his death, he himself said, "I lay down my life, that I may take it again."† If then his resurrection was so essential, his death was also necessary as a preparatory step to it.

3. The death of Jesus was necessary to give efficacy and power to his religion, not merely by convincing the understanding of its truth, but by engaging our affections in its favor, by drawing to it our attention, and interesting our hearts in it. Our affections fix themselves upon persons rather than upon abstract truths. We attend with much greater interest to the lesson, when we love the teacher. Now the unexampled love of Jesus in laying down his life for us takes hold of the affections, subdues the soul to love, and awakens an inclination to pay a cheerful attention to his instructions, and a willing obedience to his commands. At the foot of the cross the hearts of thousands have been melted into contrition, penitence

* Rom, i. 4. † John x. 17.

and love. They have witnessed the agony endured for their sakes, while they were yet sinners, endured too with such willingness and resignation, with such meekness and forgiveness, and their hearts have been captivated with the beauty of holiness. They have looked upon him, whose hands were torn by nails, whose feet were lacerated by thongs, and whose side was pierced with the spear to save them from their sins, and their souls have been affected. From each one of his wounds a voice of melting persuasion has been heard. They have resolved to do something to effect the object for which the Saviour died. They have resolved not to suffer their souls to be polluted with sin, to redeem them from which the Son of God poured out his blood like water. They have become ashamed of those iniquities, which cost the Redeemer his mortal agonies; they have abandoned them at the foot of the cross, and resolved that with respect to themselves the Redeemer should not die in vain. They have been led to crucify their baser passions and evil habits. "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb."* In this way the death of Christ has had a glorious effect in imparting efficacy and power to his instructions, his precepts, and his example. The Son of man has been glorified by it. Thousands have gratefully adopted the fervent language of the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world," i. e. in view of which, the sinful world loses all its attractions for me, and I lose all taste for the sinful pleasures of the world.

* Rev. vii. 14.

By opposing the doctrine of unconditional election, of total depravity, and of punishment by substitute, I have endeavored to magnify the grace of God. To exalt human merit has been the thing farthest from my heart. It has ever appeared to me the greatest absurdity in the world to suppose that any human being can merit eternal happiness. We do not merit the enjoyments we have in this world; much less an eternal life of happiness. We owe our Lord ten thousand talents and we have nothing wherewith to pay. But such is his abundant mercy, that he freely forgives the debt upon certain conditions, or to those who have certain qualifications. These conditions or qualifications are faith, repentance, and a new life. Not that these have any merit in them to deserve the remission of so great a debt, but that God is so infinitely merciful as to give the promise of eternal life upon such gracious conditions. If some indulgent father should promise his son a splendid fortune upon the condition of his performing the labor of a single day, the son would expect the performance of the promise upon the fulfilment of the condition. But he would not pretend that he had merited this fortune. Nor would he have the lower opinion of the generosity of his father, because so much work was required of him as the condition of its bestowment. Now the generosity of such an earthly parent is but a faint image of the exceeding mercy of our Father in Heaven in promising eternal life to the penitent Christian, who patiently continues in well-doing. It is rich, unmerited, amazing mercy. We disclaim, therefore, every pretension to merit. We rely not upon an arm of flesh for our salvation. We trust to the free, impartial, unpurchased mercy of the everlasting Father, prom-

ised to those, who believe, repent, and obey the gospel, by Jesus Christ. In vain will you search through the universe for a better foundation than this.

V. I have represented mankind as capable, but frail; able to stand, but prone to fall, and therefore bound to seek and pray for that aid of the spirit, which is promised to them that ask for it. All spiritual aid, however, I have represented to be as capable of being resisted as the influence of parental instruction, of a sermon, or of a providential dispensation. "Ye do always resist the holy spirit,"* says St. Stephen. I have also represented this spiritual aid, as bestowed upon all, as impartially as the light of the sun, or the rain of heaven, which bring to maturity an abundant harvest for him, who prepares the soil and sows the seed in season, but which will not prevent him, who sits folding his hands in seed-time, from starving in harvest.

VI. Regeneration I have represented as a doctrine of the gospel, applicable in a peculiar and emphatic sense to the first converts from Judaism and Heathenism, and in an important sense to men at the present day. It denotes that great spiritual change, experienced by one, who passes from ignorance, unbelief, or indifferent belief, and sin, to an enlightened, and hearty faith, and the holiness of heart and life required by the gospel. It is a figurative expression, the full meaning of which is expressed in the literal terms faith, repentance, a pure heart, and a holy life; in one word the acquisition of the christian

* Acts, vii. 51.

character. Whoever has acquired a sincere faith in Christ, and whose faith purifies his heart and influences his life, he is born again in the Scripture sense; he is a new creature; he is the new man created in righteousness and true holiness, whether the acquisition be the gradual growth of religious education, or the fruit of more sudden impressions. He has spiritual endowments, which he did not receive at his natural birth. Especially when the unbelieving or the thoughtless, has received Jesus as his infallible guide and Saviour with a true and hearty faith; when the lover of pleasure has become a lover of God; when the proud has clothed himself with humility; when the passionate and revengeful has become meek and forgiving; when the unjust has learned sacredly to respect the rights of his neighbor, and made reparation and restitution for past injustice to the extent of his ability; when the selfish and avaricious has learned to open his heart and his hands to the claims of charity; when the sensualist is adorned with inward purity, and when the profane and irreligious has acquired the spirit of piety and of prayer — to say that such a one is a new man, born again, or regenerated, is to use no more than a very natural and intelligible expression. There is no mystery in the thought, or the language. But when it is asserted that this vast change of character is instantaneous, then indeed the mind is perplexed with an unfathomable mystery. Then we are presented with a phenomenon as unlike any thing that takes place in the natural, or intellectual world, as light to darkness.

I have represented the acquisition of the christian character as generally gradual, the fruit of long-continued exertion and persevering prayer, admitting that some

instances do occur of very rapid transition from unbelief or indifferent belief and sin to true faith and christian excellence. I have maintained that our hope that we are Christians should be founded on our conscious possession of the christian dispositions and graces, and not on the time or the manner, in which we come to possess them; that it is a most dangerous mistake to make what we may have experienced at one particular time, perhaps at some distant period of our lives, the evidence of our possessing the christian character; that the only solid evidence, the only hope that will not make ashamed, must arise from the knowledge of what we are *now*, drawn from an impartial examination of the heart and survey of the life. "Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." * "By their fruits ye shall know them." †

VII. I have maintained that none arrive at such a state of perfection in this world, as to be beyond the danger of falling away; that as Adam fell from a state of innocence, so true Christians may fall from a state of holiness; that as the wicked may turn from his sins, so "the righteous may turn away from his righteousness." ‡

VIII. I have maintained the doctrine of a righteous retribution; of rewards for the righteous and of punishment for the wicked, beyond the present life. This has always appeared to me a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Take away the fear of punishment beyond the present life, and you take away a powerful curb upon the evil passions of men; you weaken one of the supports

* 1 John ii. 3. † Mat. vii. 20. ‡ Ezek. xviii. 24.

of human virtue, and you diminish the security of your property and your lives. It has not, however, been my delight to speak of the terrors of the Lord. I have endeavored in this respect to follow the course of the Saviour, and the Apostles, who make a very sparing use of terror in comparison with other motives, which they address to the minds of men; who promise more than they threaten; persuade more than they alarm; and who allure more than they drive. I believe that the fear of punishment never produced in the soul the genuine love of God; but it has often proved "the beginning of wisdom." It has arrested the attention of the careless, and prepared their souls for the influence of better motives; and it has proved a safeguard to the virtue of good men, under the pressure of strong temptation. The exact nature and duration of future punishment I have not considered as revealed in the Scriptures, and I have not attempted, in this respect to be wise beyond what is written.

I have thus endeavored to give you a brief summary of the doctrines, which I have maintained during the course of my ministry; doctrines, which I embraced after an anxious examination of the Scriptures, in opposition to the prejudices of a thorough religious education, and to the influence of beloved friends and benefactors; and in which I have been more confirmed in proportion as I have extended my acquaintance with the sacred volume; and which I shall continue to preach, until "new light shall break forth upon me from the word of God."

Time will not permit me to go into so full a review of the duties, which in my past discourses I have endeavored to illustrate and enforce. Of the general duties in-

cluded under the term regeneration, I have already spoken. I find upon examination that the love of God has been enjoined upon you as the primary duty of religion, and the foundation of all other duties; that the love of man has been inculcated as a fundamental duty in itself, and an essential evidence of our love to God. "For he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?"* I find that I have insisted much upon imitation of Jesus Christ; upon self-examination, self-government, and self-denial; upon forgiveness of injuries; upon candid and charitable judgment; upon the duty of exercising our reason in the discovery of divine truth; of exercising the right of private judgment, and allowing others to do the same; and upon the duty of resisting all human dominion over the conscience and faith. I have insisted much upon the importance of public worship, and of the ordinances of our religion, at the same time reminding you that mercy is better than sacrifice. I have earnestly inculcated the duty of prayer, especially, the prayer of the closet, as a main support of a life according to godliness. I have recommended a regular and constant performance of the common, every day duties of life, as a better test of the christian character, than those more formal and public acts, which attract the notice and receive the applause of men. I have insisted that deeds are better proof of piety than words, and that talking Christians are much less worthy of our imitation than walking Christians.

I have endeavored to encourage a warm zeal in the concerns of religion, and at the same time to show the necessity of uniting with it knowledge, discretion, and

* 1 John. iv. 20.

charity. I have warned you against the love of the world, and devotion to its pleasures, as most dangerous foes to the growth of christian principle in the soul; and especially against the abuse of God's gifts by intemperance and riot. I have reminded parents of their duties to their children, and children of their duties to their parents, and of the immense importance of forming early dispositions and habits of piety and virtue; and to all I have recommended a life of continual industry as the use of the talent, with which they are intrusted, and a defence against the force of temptation. That I may hereafter recommend with great power and illustrate with greater clearness the same great doctrines and duties, will be the subject of my, and I trust, of your earnest prayer, and of my constant exertions.

And, may I not hope, my friends, that you will institute a careful self-examination, and ascertain what influence the truths and precepts, which you have heard, have had upon your souls; how far the seed of the Gospel has been cast into good ground, and how far you have been forgetful hearers and not doers of the word. God grant, that we all supply what is wanting, and correct what is wrong in ourselves both with respect to the duties of this house, and to the general duties of the christian life. May we thus be prepared to meet together at the judgment seat of him, before whom we must all stand, and there receive the welcome sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."